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PROGRAMME-LEVEL ACTIVITIES

International Year for the World's Indigenous People

Report of the Administrator

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report on the International Year for the World's Indigenous People has been prepared in response to Governing Council decision 91/12 of 25 June 1991.

2. There are clear indications of the growing commitment on the part of the international community to address the problems faced by indigenous communities. Actions are being encouraged which: (a) protect and promote the rights of indigenous people; (b) recognize and make use of their skills and knowledge in critically important areas; and (c) enable them to participate in all areas of development.

II. EXPERIENCE WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

3. In association with developing country governments and United Nations specialized agencies, UNDP has long been concerned with the concerns and issues of indigenous people. Examples of recent and current activities include:

(a) The funding, in association with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank, of a workshop convened by the Government of Colombia in March 1991 on land-tenure issues and the management of natural resources by indigenous communities. The workshop was attended by indigenous representatives and experts from eight countries of Latin America;

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(b) The participation of indigenous people in the brainstorming session organized in 1991 on governance, the State and civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a view to broadening the participation of indigenous communities in project formulation and programme revision and to securing such participation in the technical group and Commission on environment and development in the Amazon region;

(c) Two preparatory assistance projects in the Latin America and Caribbean region on (a) the management of natural resources by indigenous communities and the promotion of alternatives for the management of timber and non-timber resources by indigenous tribes living in forests and (b) technical assistance to the Government of Bolivia, acting on behalf of other governments in the region, for the establishment of a fund for the development of indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean;

(d) The funding, in 1990, of a seminar on Pygmy life in the Central African Republic, which was attended by government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to explore ways in which the health and education needs of the Pygmies in the Central African Republic could be met without disrupting their culture and relationship to the environment;

(e) The funding, in southern Laos, of a rural development project that seeks to improve the living conditions of isolated hill tribes and to integrate them more fully in the mainstream of Lao life, in particular through better access to health and educational services and the development of the forest and water resources of the region;

(f) The UNDP contribution to the preparatory process of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), consisting in (a) the organization, in March 1991, of an international NGO consultation on poverty, environment and development, with participation from indigenous people's organizations and (b) support to Brazilian indigenous people's organizations for activities related to UNCED.

III. PROPOSED DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES

4. Indigenous communities around the world vary greatly from demographic, economic, cultural and other points of view. However, they share several common characteristics which, taken together, define indigenous people as vulnerable groups often living in extreme poverty. These characteristics are: a subordinate position within national societies; marginal and inhospitable territories; subsistence economies; languages which are, for the most part, unwritten; cultural marginalization; maladjustments due to migration from rural to urban areas; and threatened ancestral habitats, particularly rain forests.

5. As regards future emphases and activities, UNDP will be guided by its previous experience and by Governing Council decision 90/34, in which the Council mandated the Programme to establish human development as the framework for all its activities and identified the six major areas of focus for the fifth cycle. On this basis, the two areas which are most relevant to the needs of indigenous people are (a) poverty eradication and grass-roots participation in development and (b) environmental problems and natural

resource management. Following a process of consultations which have taken place since 1991 with a range of indigenous people's organizations and experts, it is suggested that UNDP could support the following types of activities:

(a) Improvement of living standards, through (i) nutrition including in particular the recovery of knowledge of nutrition and related changes in dietary habits; (ii) health, in particular health education for healers, midwives and other indigenous health specialists, immunization and primary health care, and infrastructural support for health projects, combining small-scale modern technology and traditional experience; and (iii) social security, the introduction of community-based health-care systems articulated with services available from the State, local governments and the private sector;

(b) Economic and technological development through (i) the removal of obstacles to creativity, the promotion of entrepreneurial capacity and the articulation of indigenous people's economic processes with existing structures and markets; (ii) greater participation in decision-making on, and management of, territories and resources; (iii) articulation of traditional and modern know-how in order to raise incomes through small capital investments and better use of labour and natural resources; and (iv) dissemination and replication of successful approaches and projects and exchanges of skills and experience;

(c) Preservation of natural resources and environmental conservation through (i) recovery, consolidation and dissemination of traditional knowledge and skills in the use and maintenance of natural habitats and resources; (ii) participation of indigenous communities in resource management and conservation strategies and practices; and (iii) preservation of indigenous people's territories from environmentally unsound or socially and culturally inappropriate activities;

(d) Cultural revitalization through (i) recovery, strengthening and dissemination of indigenous traditions and languages; (ii) acquisition of skills in handling official languages; and (iii) networking and replication of successful approaches and projects.

6. Like other activities undertaken by UNDP to promote human development, those concerned with improving the condition of indigenous people should be participatory in their design, implementation and evaluation. They should also be based on the concept of reciprocity, which will make it possible to utilize the knowledge and skills of indigenous communities, in particular in natural resource management, environmental conservation and health (e.g., medicinal plants), on a broader societal base. Where appropriate, collaboration with NGOs working with indigenous people will be encouraged.

IV. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

7. When such activities are built into country programmes, indicative planning figure resources should enable UNDP to meet the needs of indigenous communities. Additional resources may also be found in inter-country, regional and interregional and global programmes, should the demand for UNDP services so require.

8. Resources in relevant Special Programme Resources (SPR) categories, such as environment and natural resources management, and poverty eradication may also be drawn upon as appropriate, within the criteria set forth, to support initiatives benefiting indigenous people. The possible need for SPR funds to be earmarked specifically for indigenous people will be kept under review. On the other hand, given that 1993 will be the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, the Governing Council may wish to establish a specific SPR category for activities in support of indigenous people.

9. Finally, as opportunities for UNDP assistance to indigenous people arise and specific strategies are developed, extrabudgetary resources may also be sought.

V. UNDP PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

10. Due consideration will be given to the programme of activities contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/128, in particular section I C thereof. UNDP will continue to participate in the meetings convened to foster coordination among United Nations specialized agencies and organizations before and during the International Year for the World's Indigenous People and to join in efforts to harmonize operational guidelines concerning activities relevant to indigenous communities.